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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SANAA 001633

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ARP AND PRM  
AMMAN FOR REFCOORD RUSTY INGRAHAM

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YM

SUBJECT: PEAK REFUGEE SEASON: INCREASING NUMBERS OF  
ETHIOPIANS MAY REDUCE YEMEN,S ABILITY TO WELCOME

REF: SANAA 1287

Classified By: Ambassador Stephen A. Seche for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (U) This cable was drafted in coordination with Embassy  
Addis Ababa.

Summary  
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12. (C) SUMMARY: Press reporting on the &12,0008 refugees  
crammed into Bossaso, Somalia waiting to transit to Yemen in  
September has been largely exaggerated. Many of these  
refugees have already arrived, with perhaps only a fourth of  
this number still awaiting transport. The more important  
trend is the growing number of Ethiopian arrivals on Yemeni  
shores and the pending influx in September-October. The  
increased volume of migrants will undoubtedly strain an  
already stressed ROYG as ell as international organizations,  
NGOs, and emassies.

Background  
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13. (SBU) The RYG is currently faig a major insurgency in  
the orth, continuing protests in the South, and increaing  
threats from al-Qa,ida in the Arabian Peninsla (AQAP). Due  
to its geographical location, Yeen has long been a transit  
point for migrants an refugees alike. Despite its relative  
poverty, Yeen has welcomed Somali migrants with open arms.  
ow the country faces an unprecedented set of internal  
problems in conjunction with the largest influx of migrants  
and refugees in its modern history.

Peak Migration Season  
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14. (C) After the stormy seas calm at the end of August,  
September ) October becomes the peak season for migrants  
seeking to cross the Gulf of Aden onto Yemeni shores. This  
year,s coincidence of this maritime change and the lax  
security during Ramada contribute heavily to the increase in  
arrivals,according to UNHCR country director Claire  
Bourgois. (Note: With most of the country fasting during  
Ramadan, the security services are no exception. Limited  
vigilance during the day and outright negligence during iftar  
are readily apparent. End Note.) Recent international press

reports have indicated a build-up of 12,000 potential refugees waiting in Bossaso, Somalia. As of June there were only 3,000 potential refugees waiting, with 2,000 previously departed, according to Bourgeois. The 12,000 number reported in the press is actually closer to the number of Somali arrivals this year (15,052) than the number of Somalis waiting in Bossaso.

#### Explaining a Changing Demographic

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15. (SBU) The majority of refugees in Yemen have historically been Somalis (REFTEL). This is due mostly to the conflict there, Yemen's geographic proximity, and the Yemeni practice of granting Somalis prima facie refugee status. While many use Yemen as a jumping off point to Saudi Arabia or Europe, most settle into life in Yemen. Until this year, the majority of arrivals were Somalis who fit this basic profile. In the last seven months, however, approximately 17,000 out of 33,000 arrivals have been Ethiopians. This represents more than the total number of Ethiopian arrivals to Yemen during all of 2008.

16. (SBU) The changing demographic of arrivals has also corresponded to a change in transit points. Previously, most of the arrivals coming from Somalia crossed the Gulf of Aden. According to UNHCR data, however, the majority of recent arrivals departed from Obock, Djibouti, crossed the Red Sea, and arrived in the Hudaydah governorate. This voyage is several hundred kilometers shorter and somewhat safer than its Somali counterpart.

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17. (C) This dramatic shift in arrivals is not easily explained. Ethiopians do not have prima facie status, live in a more politically and economically secure country, and are among the most vulnerable of migrants to Yemen (REFTEL). Nonetheless, their numbers have grown to a point that they have surpassed Somalis as the largest group of arrivals, despite the fact that very few of them will gain legal status. According to UNHCR representative Samer Haddadin, only 688 of the 17,000 arrivals this year even applied for asylum. Still, NGOs continue to process almost all arrivals and grant them a ten-day pass that allows them to register with UNHCR.

18. (C) Unlike their Somali counterparts, Ethiopian migrants are less likely to remain in Yemen. Their goal is to work in the richer Gulf countries or transit to Europe. In fact, the ROYG does not allow Ethiopians to reside in the refugee camps, and most settle in Sana'a. Those who are unable to transit out of Yemen remain to work. Yet jobs are hard to come by for men, and hundreds are imprisoned each month. Most are then deported back to Ethiopia. The Ethiopian Consul in Yemen claimed in an August 9 meeting that most can pay their own way home and are not penalized upon their return. He contrasted his government's policies with Eritrea's, which he claimed imprisons those returning from Yemen.

#### Migrants Not Refugees?

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19. (C) In further contrast to the Somalis breaching Yemen's shores, most Ethiopians arriving to Yemen are considered economic migrants and are treated as such until they obtain refugee status from UNHCR. Bourgeois, however, intimated in an August 3 meeting that the conflicts in Tigre and Ogaden regions play a larger role than the Ethiopians or Yemenis are willing to admit. Stefano Tamagnini, the Chief of Mission for the International Organization for Migration (IOM), noted in a September 1 presentation that many Oromos and Amhara are fleeing political persecution.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, according to the Ethiopian Embassy in Sana'a, only 15-20 out of 118 Ethiopians arrested in Sana'a for being in illegal immigration status during the first week in August were not

from the regions in question. While the Ethiopian consul admitted that some legitimate refugees come to Yemen to escape the problems in those regions (perhaps 200 or so this year), he placed the numbers at under two percent of the total Ethiopian arrivals. UNHCR contends that the Ethiopians are overly willing to deport their own citizens from Yemen in order to maintain a good relationship with the ROYG. (Comment: The paltry numbers of Ethiopians seeking political asylum, however, speak for themselves. End Comment.)

Why Yemen?  
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¶10. (C) Yemen, the poorest country in the Middle East, provides economic opportunities for Ethiopians coming from the poorer sections of that country. According to the Ethiopian consul, some Ethiopians can make two or three times as much as they would at home and enjoy a lower cost of living. In Sana'a, for example, Ethiopian women readily find jobs in house-keeping that Yemenis will often not take. Drought, chronic food insecurity, limited access for NGOs providing relief, and conflict are other major contributors to emigration from Ethiopia. In Yemen, NGOs are merely reacting to the increasing numbers and have not been able to compose a full contingency plan for the September influx, according to Bourgeois. The number of arrivals in Yemen this year may reach 70,000 ) up from 50,000 last year, according to UNHCR statistics.

COMMENT  
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¶11. (SBU) If the trend continues that a larger percentage of these arrivals will include Ethiopian economic migrants, relations between the ROYG and Ethiopia may become strained.

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Moreover, the increased volume will most certainly test the capacity of local NGOs to process the new arrivals. Without a corresponding increase in resources and planning, which to date do not exist, the organizations charged with processing and providing services to refugees will undoubtedly come under severe stress. With a myriad of other destabilizing factors plaguing Yemen, it remains to be seen what larger effect this new influx will have on the greater stability of the country. End Comment.  
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